

A Diary at the Juryou-an Hermitage

August 24, 1710 (October 16, by the lunar calendar)

Since I was asked earnestly by Rev. Ryo to stay at his hermitage during his absence, I walked to his residence nearby. As soon as he saw me outside the door, he left, telling me to take care of things after he went away.

Hearing the dog barking loudly, I happened to open the sliding paper door and lo! I was captivated by a picturesque scene. An owl sitting on a stone in the pond and a crow on a branch of the persimmon tree with ripened fruit came into my view. In the paddy a farmer was reaping rice with his sickle bending his knees, and looking down south I could see the pine groves of downtown Saga in the distance. In the farther distance was seen Mt. Unzen with its top enveloped in white mist. The Shogunate envoy must have missed it when they visited Saga recently. That landscape was charming enough to make me forget my itching skin. I said to myself, "Oh, yes, I'll make use of this chance to finish my job of proofing the text of verses by the priest named Angen." This is a short poem I wrote after proofing it.

Making words as a torch

I try to reach the heart of human beings

Just like going into the heart of the Miyoshino Mountains with a stick.

Hearing someone calling, I took off my glasses to find a messenger of Mr. Ogawa, my acquaintance, at the door. He brought letters to the two nuns living nearby. So I took him to their hermitage. They thanked him for bringing the letters and told him to go back home soon.

After a while I heard the dog barking again and went to the door to find Gichu, a monk and another friend of mine. We exchanged greetings and enjoyed talking to each other after a long absence. Then a young man came to see Monk Gichu and told him that a mason in Saikawa Village had visited the monk for some business. It was not long before they bade farewell to me to leave, when, to my surprise, I heard steps in the vegetable garden. A young boy was picking persimmons up in the tree. This is another short poem.

*A crow on a branch is staring at a boy
Picking fruits on the persimmon tree.*

In the evening Gonsuke, the sexton, came back from Shimomura Village. “Now you’re back,” I said to him. “I’ve been waiting for you for quite a long time.” He set to work preparing dinner and after a time offered it to me. The sun had already set in the western mountains of Kasuga, and the prayer bells were resounding from the temples in the neighborhood. I also heard the monotonous sound of the wooden drum struck by the sexton of a temple nearby. All of these signs made me feel even more lonesome. I lit a candle for Lord Buddha, recited sutras, and boiled some herbs for myself, paying attention to the fire. However, I awoke to the sound of raining after a while. I thought of the uncovered jar of vinegar and hurried to the place only to find it covered by falling leaves, not by rainfall. This is the third poem.

Living in a remote place far from the town
I was led to mistake the sound of falling leaves
For falling rain.

August 25 (October 17)

The eastern skies were turning bright. The sexton built a fire with charcoal and went out to gather fallen chestnuts. I wrote this poem.

*Chestnuts in their bur look unfriendly outside
However, they contain something very friendly inside.
Doesn't it apply to some humans?*

I burned some incense and poured fresh water in the bottles at the altar. I also served a bowl of rice to Lord Buddha and chanted the sutras. Then the sexton came and said to me, “I’m sure you must be tired if pumpkins now. Let me serve you eggplants boiled in *miso* soup this morning.” Then he went to the mountains with his hatchet.

As I was making ink at my desk, Rev. Chushi dropped in to tell me that he was going down to the town of Saga. We had a talk with each other for some time, and he walked away. Soon Mr. Murayama came and we spent some more time talking. Soon after

Murayama returned, the sexton came home from the mountains. I told him to pick some persimmons, into which I bit. They were really tasty. Then I took a nap. This is a poem I wrote when I awoke.

*It is only during my sleeping
That I can forget my worldly troubles.
Oh, how melancholic the autumn makes me feel!*

I wrote another poem because I came to realize the vanity of life with the chilly wind.

*I won't be allowed to disappear from this world with the blowing wind,
Though all the plants are already withering day after day.
I do miss our children who left us behind.*

Another evening set in for today. I read the sacred books aloud and sat in front of Lord Buddha for some time. Gonsuke, the sexton, came back from the village of Wakamiyahara, so I put out the candles and went to sleep.

August 26 (October 18)

With the sunrise I awoke and smoked a cigarette to feel refreshed. Looking out from the verandah, I was enchanted by the beautiful landscape around. I wrote this poem from its deep impression.

*Red-turned maples in sight,
I can't hold my pen in hand
Simply because they are too beautiful.*

I also heard a sharp cry of a butcher-bird and write this poem.

*Sharp-sounding songs of a shrike
Makes me think of its resolute attitude as well.*

As I listened to the shrike's songs I could not help thinking of my way of living. I seem to spend my days only eating and sleeping. Isn't it the shrike leading a life more honorable than myself? Gonsuke, the sexton, went to the mountains again, when I

saw a family of woodcutters, young and old, even infant, walking in the direction of the mountains, each with a stick on the shoulder. I wrote this poem again.

*How carefree these woodcutters are
Their life with no worldly troubles!
While I grow older repenting of my life.*

I wrote another poem because nobody visited this place all day today.

*What a lonely day it was!
Even the neighbor's cat didn't appear at all.*

Once in a while a person or another was seen passing by the bank of the pond in front. This is the poem I wrote of them.

*Please turn to me, Walkers,
For once!
To me, lingering in the dusk of autumn.*

I also heard the chirping of insects in the grass and wrote this one.

*The grasshoppers are chirping noisily in the daytime.
Are they singing for some reason?*

The woodcutter's family came back from the mountains. I was really impressed by their working so hard. It must be really tough for them to cultivate their vegetable garden, harvest beans and sesame seeds. They have to collect fruit like chestnuts and persimmons, too. They are working hard all the year round. Admitting that their manual works are allotted to poor people like them, I am really impressed by their hard working.

Wondering what kind of dinner I'd like to have, I came to think of rice porridge, so I asked the sexton to prepare a bowl of rice porridge for me. "Sorry but there are no vegetables to go with it, though you can have some *azuki* beans," he said. "Then what about last year's *azuki* beans and cowpeas stored in the shed?" I said. "But I'm afraid I shouldn't inspect the shed," he said, so I told him to do so. He went in and came back

with some cowpeas partly eaten by worms. "Isn't it a good idea," I said to myself. "to eat a bowl of porridge boiled with worm-eaten cowpeas?"

Turning to the rice paddy in the setting sun, I saw a farmer going home with a stack of rice on his back. It was as if I were looking at a picture and I wrote this poem.

*A stack of rice is being carried
But it looks as if moving by itself
Not on the farmer's back.*

Then I heard the sound of the bells echoing from neighboring temples. It made me feel really sad. Inspired by the resounding bells, I wrote this poem.

*Listening to the echoing bells at dusk
I was moved to tears.
How evanescent is life!*

When I finished reading the sutras, Mr. Kamohara visited for some business with Rev. Ryo. I told him he was absent and that I was in charge, and he entered the house to explain his intention. After some time another Buddhist monk named Icchi-bo came along. As he talked in a loud voice and laughed often, they said his loud laugh could move a mountain! He talked and talked and talked in his roaring tone for some time and walked away with a brisk step. I wrote this poem.

*Thanks to the loud laugh of the monk,
Quietness of the autumn is disappeared.*

Soon I lay down on my *futon*. It was at dawn when I woke up to urinate. This is the poem I wrote then.

*I relieved myself in the garden
As I stood in the moonlight at break of day.*

August 27 (October 19)

Rain began to fall when I awoke, so I woke up the sexton to put a lid on the vinegar jar.

I also asked him for my tobacco tray to enjoy smoking in bed. After a time I folded my beddings to put away in the closet, thinking of Rev. Ryo's coming home within the day.

An hour or so passed and it was still raining, when I said to myself, "Let me ask the Sexton to burn *moxa* herb on the skin. Then I'll do this and that before it gets dark, and Rev. Ryo will be back home." I asked Gonsuke to repair my wooden clogs, and then quite unexpectedly he came back. In delight I greeted him and handed this dairy to him, saying that I kept it during his absence. Then I left his place.